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RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 3221  
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 1036  
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 1484  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 0907  
RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE  
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 2088  
RUEHRC/DEPT OF AGRICULTURE WASHDC  
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RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
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SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: USAID MISSION DIRECTOR VISITS MARY PROVINCE

¶1. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

¶2. (U) SUMMARY: On December 15, USAID/CAR Regional Mission Director Bill Frej met with recently appointed Mary Provincial Governor Kakageldi Gurbanov and visited a local farmers' organization that has partnered with several USAID projects. Appointed to the provincial post just one month prior after previously serving as Mary city mayor, Gurbanov presented a positive demeanor and suggested more joint farmer-to-farmer interactions would improve their results. A discussion with USAID's agricultural program partner, Ilkinjiler, highlighted the disconnect between good legislation and poor implementation. Participants listed access to land via long-term term leases, ownership of the outputs, and access to microfinance as among their leading priorities to increase productivity in the sector. Others stressed continued education and advocacy efforts with local government as keys to finding solutions to pressing challenges. END SUMMARY.

¶3. (U) During his first visit to Turkmenistan, USAID Regional Mission Director Bill Frej met with local government officials and monitored USAID's ongoing programs in Mary province on December 15. Calling his reception in Turkmenistan the "most embracing" of all the Central Asian republics, Frej expressed his thanks for the productive environment for USAID's partners in Mary province. He noted that Turkmenistan's Ambassador to the U.S. attended his swearing-in ceremony, which served as a sign of the possibilities for our bilateral relationship.

¶4. (U) Gurbanov thanked Frej for his overview of USAID's activities in Mary and his itinerary, and suggested that he save time for visiting Mary's historical sites as well. In order to understand a place well, one needs to visit that place's historical sites. He also described a visit from a previous Embassy delegation that met with local farmers, and were pleased to see that the farmers were being paid for their efforts. The discussion between Embassy staff and farmers was interesting, but would have been more productive if the discussion had been farmer-to-farmer instead. In response to

Gurbanov's question about the results of USAID's agricultural programs, USAID Country Representative provided a brief overview of USAID-funded projects implemented by Winrock and Counterpart in Mary and passed information on the new AgLinks program, which supports private farmers and agribusinesses with market-driven production to increase their output and incomes. Some of the work planned under this project includes greenhouse production, drying, packaging, dairy and veterinary services. Frej closed by stressing that the United States Government was ready to work in partnership to meet Turkmenistan's development objectives.

#### ILKINJILER: EDUCATION AND ADVOCACY PARAMOUNT

**¶15.** (U) After meeting with Gurbanov, Frej visited the Ilkinjiler Farmers' Association in Bayramali district. Ilkinjiler began in 1997 as an informal association of farmers, and was registered as a limited liability partnership organization in 2000. In 2005, USAID awarded Ilkinjiler a grant through Counterpart International to increase farmers' legal awareness on the new land and water laws. Later in 2005, Counterpart expanded its institutional grant to establish an Agricultural Resource Center to support the public advocacy and entrepreneurial capacities of farmers. Under this project, Ilkinjiler assisted local farmers in conducting needs' assessment, and provided community development and agricultural business training programs. As a result of Ilkinjiler's activities, eight new farmers' groups were established, which implemented local community development projects.

**¶16.** (U) The group's leader presented an overview of Ilkinjiler's cooperative efforts with various USAID-funded programs, including Winrock Farmer-to-Farmer and Counterpart Water Users' Association and Community Empowerment projects. Summarizing his views of the current situation, he said that since the increase in cotton prices

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mandated by President Niyazov in 2005, farmers' incomes and livelihoods had improved. Going forward, his hope was that Turkmenistan's farmers would not be forced to return to the collective farm system, but that they could draw from the best international models. To him, this meant that private farming was the only way forward.

**¶17.** (U) Detailing some of Ilkinjiler's recent advocacy efforts, the leader said that they drafted recommendations with the signatures of over 200 people for submission to the Mejlis (Parliament) and the Ministry of Agriculture. The two leading issues were to develop long-term leases, with the right to inherit land, and granting farmers' ownership of their outputs, rather than forcing them to sell a percentage to the state. Another member suggested that access to microfinance and poor soil quality were important issues. Overall, the group agreed that a disconnect exists whereby sometimes good legislation is thwarted by poor implementation. The remedy for this was to increase the people's education level and to be willing to advocate for one's rights. To this end, participants recognized that relations with local government officials were critical and vowed to continue their engagement with that goal in mind.

**¶18.** (U) COMMENT: In a Saturday morning meeting, Mary's new governor was hospitable and cordial, and welcomed expanded cooperation with USAID. Deputy Governor Amanova took detailed notes on the description of USAID's agricultural programs in Mary province, and dispatched two assistants to accompany USAID's delegation throughout the day.

**¶19.** (U) COMMENT CONTINUED: The pointed comments by Ilkinjiler's members in front of local government representatives again demonstrated their oft-cited courage and independence. The group remains one of the most vocal advocates for its members' rights in Turkmenistan, with a strongly pro-market orientation. Unlike some other NGOs, the group's members ask for continued access to information and U.S. advocacy for their issues in high-level meetings rather than funding, a recognition that they themselves hold ultimate responsibility for bringing about positive changes. USAID's Community Empowerment Project and the recently launched AgLinks projects will continue to support their local initiatives through both legal and technical economic assistance. END COMMENT.

¶10. (U) AID Regional Mission Director William Frej cleared this cable.

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